BUDDHISM AND ASTROLOGY

By

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Introduction *(by Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda)*

Ever since man began to observe the world and its surroundings, he has suspected that there is a link between himself and the stars. He has felt that their movements influence his life and as a result thinkers from every culture have tried to explain this relationship and find some meaning in it. This article explores the Buddhist point of view regarding this fascination of man with the Universe. Buddhism rejects the cold scientific attitude of materialism towards phenomena. It also warns the ignorant against total enslavement to the workings of the external powers. It advocates an intelligent attitude towards our relationship between ourselves and the stars.

Buddhism and Astrology

From the very beginning of time man has been fascinated by the stars and he has always tried to find some links between them and his own destiny. His observation of the stars and their movemenst gave rise to two very important areas of study, namely Astronomy and Astrology. Astronomy can be considered a pure science which is concerned with the measurement of distances, the evolution and destruction of stars, their movements and so on. Of course all these calculations are always made in relation to planet earth and how these interplanetary movements affect mankind on a physical level. Modern astronomy seeks to find answers to the still unanswered questions regarding the origin of man and the final, possible end of his existence as a member of the human race. It is fascinating area of study and our new knowledge of the Universe and the galaxies has put much pressure on many religions to evaluate their old-age postulations regarding a creator and the creation of life.

Buddhism does not face any such dilemma, simply because the Buddha did not encourage his followers to speculate on things which were beyond their comprehension. However he has made many allusions which in the light of our new knowledge gained through science, shows us that the Buddha was very much aware of the true nature of the Universe, that it was never created in one glorious moment, that the earth is merely a tiny even relatively unimportant speck in all space, that there is a constant creation and destruction and that everything is in constant motion.

Astrology, however is a completely different area of study altogether. Ever since early man began to think, he was deeply concerned about his relationship with the universe. When man developed from hunting to agriculture, he began to notice a link between the movement of the sun through the year and his own activities of planting, harvesting and similar projects. As he became more sophisticated he was able to predict the movement of the sun and he invented time, dividing it into years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds.

He associated this knowledge with his existence whereby he felt that there was a relationship between his own life cycle and the movement of the planets. This gave rise to the Zodiacs - the apparent path of the sun. It contains twelve constellations. A study of these movements in relation to the human being's personal life is called a horoscope.

The study of astrology involves a great understanding of human nature, an ability to assess planetary movements precisely, together with an insight into the seemingly unexplainable phenomena in the universe. There have been many brilliant astrologers in the past and some exist even today. Unfortunately there are an even larger number of charlatans who give astrology a bad name. They hood-wink people by predicting seemingly true events about their future. They make large sums of money by exploiting the ignorance and fear of the gullible. As a result scientists scoffed at astrology and did not depend on it. However their hostile attitude is not really justifiable. The main purpose of reading a horoscope should be to give one an insight into one's own character, in the same way that an x-ray photograph can show the physical make-up of a man.

Statistics have shown that the influence of the sun in the signs of the Zodiac accounts for the birth of unusual people during certain months. Certain crimes have been found to correspond with Zodiac signs in which the sun is moving during certain months of the year.

Thus an understanding of this relationship will help a man to plot his life more meaningfully in harmony with his innate tendencies, so that there is less friction as he goes through life.

A new born baby is like a seed. It contains within itself all the ingredients which will make him a similar, yet completely different individual from all fellow human beings. How his potential is developed depends like the seed, on the kind of training he receives. The nature of a man born within him, but his own freewill determines whether he will make really good use of his talents and abilities. Whether he will overcome his potential for vice or weakness depends on how he is trained in his youth. If we recognize our nature – our tendency towards laziness, irritability, worries, frustrations, wickedness, cunningness, jealousy – we can take positive steps to overcome them. The first step in solving problems is to recognize them for what they are.

Astrological interpretations indicate our inclinations and tendencies. Once pointed out we must take the necessary steps to chart our lives in a manner that will make us useful citizens of the world. Even a person with criminal tendencies can become a saint. If he recognizes his nature and take steps to lead a good life.

A horoscope is a map drawn to shown the karmic force man carries, calculated from the time of his birth. The force determines the time of birth and knowing this time, a skilful astrologer can accurately chart a man's destiny within a given life-span.

Everybody knows that the earth takes approximately one year to move around the sun. This movement, viewed from the earth, places the sun in various zodiacal areas during year. A person is born *(not accidentally but as a result of karmic influence)* when the sun is in transit in one of the twelve Zodiacal signs.

Through the horoscope, the map of your life, you can determine certain times in your life when you have to slow down, certain times when you can push yourself to great levels

of creativity, and certain period when you have to watch your health and related activities.

The question most people ask is whether Buddhism accepts or rejects astrology. Strictly speaking, the Buddha did not make any direct pronouncement on this subject because as in many other cases, he stated that discussions on matters such as these do not pertain to spiritual development. Buddhism, unlike some other religions, does not condemn astrology and people are free to use the knowledge they can get from it to make their lives more meaningful. However, if we study the Buddha's teaching carefully we will come to accept that a proper and intelligent understanding of astrology can be a useful tool. Modern science is in accordance with the teachings of Buddhism. This means that there is a direct link between the life of an individual human being and the vast workings of the cosmos. We know for example that there is a close link between the movement of the moon and our behavior. This is seen especially among mentally disturbed and abnormally violent people. It is also true that certain sicknesses like asthma and bronchitis are aggravated when the moon waxes. There is therefore no reason for us not to believe that other planets can also influence our lives.

Buddhists accepts that there is an immense cosmic energy which pulsates through every living thing, including plants. This energy interacts with the karmic energy which individual generates and determines the course that a life will take. The birth of an individual is not the first creation of a life but the continuation of one that always existed and will continue to exist so long as the karmic energy is not quelled through final liberation in the unconditioned state. Now, for a life to manifest itself in a new existence, certain factors, namely seasons, germinal order and nature must be fulfilled. These are supported by mental energy and karmic energy and all these elements are in constant interaction and interdependent with each other resulting in constant changes to a human being's life.

According to astrologers the time at which a person is born is predetermined by the cosmic energy and the karmic energy. Hence, it can be concluded that life is not merely accidental; it is the result of the interaction between an individual's karma and the universal energy force. The course of a human life is predetermined, cause partly by a being's own actions in the past and the energies that activate the cosmos. Once started, a life is controlled by the interaction between these two forces even to the moment at which a birth takes place. A skilful astrologer then, as one who understands cosmic as well as karmic influence, can chart the course of one's life, based on the moment of the person's birth.

While we are in one sense at the mercy of these forces, the Buddha has pointed out a way through which we can escape its influence. All karmic energies are stored in the subconscious mind-normally described as mental purities and impurities. Since karmic forces influence one's destiny, a person can develop his mind and negate certain evil influences caused by previous bad kamma. A person can also “purify” his mind and rid himself of all karmic energies and thus prevent rebirth. When there is no rebirth, there is no potential life and there will consequently be no “future” existence which can be predicted or charted. At such stage of spiritual and mental development, one will have transcended the need to know about his life because most imperfections and unsatisfactoriness would have been removed. A highly developed human being will have no need of a horoscope.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, psychologist and psychiatrists have come to recognize that there is much more to the human mind than the hard core materialists have been ready to accept. There is more to the world that can be seen and touched. The famous Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, used to cast the horoscopes of his patients. On one occasion when he made an astrological analysis of about 500 marriages, he discovered that the findings of Ptolemy, on which modern western astrology is based, were still valid, that favourable aspects between the sun and the moon of the different partners did produce happy marriages.

The well-known French psychologist, Michel Gauguelin, who originally held a negative view of astrology, made a survey of about 20,000 horoscopical analyses and found to his surprise that the characteristics of the persons studied coincided with characterization produced by modern psychological methods.

The planting of certain tree and vegetables at different times of a year will produce differences in strength or appearance of the plants. So there is no reason to doubt that people born in certain times of the year will have different characteristics from people born at other times. By knowing his weakness, failures and short-comings, a man can do his best to overcome them and make himself a better and more useful person to the society. It will also help himself a great deal to get rid of unhappiness and disappointments. Going away from the country where a person is born, can help one avoid the influence of the stars.

Shakespeare says: “ The fault is not our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings”. A well known astrologer had said: “ The stars impel; they do not compel”. St. Thomas Aquinas says: “ The planets influence the more elemental part of man than passions”, but through his intellect man can arrange his life in harmony with the planets, and also cultivate his inherent talents and manipulate them for his betterment.

But astrology cannot automatically solve all your problems. You must do that yourself. Just like a doctor who can discover the nature of disease, an astrologer can only show certain aspects of your life and character. After that it is left to you adjust your way of life. Of course, the task will be made easier, knowing what it is you are up against. Some people are too dependent on astrology. They run to the astrologer everytime something happens or even if they have a dream. Remember, even today astrology is very much an imperfect science and even the best astrologers can make serious mistakes. Use astrology intelligently, just as you would use any tool which would make your life more comfortable and more enjoyable. Above all beware of fake astrologers who are out to cheat you by telling you not the truth, but what you want to hear.

Do not expect good luck to come to you or be handed to you easily without any effort on your part. If you want to reap the harvest, you must sow the seed and it must be the right seed. Remember, “Opportunity knocks at the door, but never break the lock to gain entrance”.